

January 23, 2006

## **UPPER MISSOURI RIVER BREAKS NATIONAL MONUMENT INTERPRETIVE CENTER**

### **PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:**

The community of Fort Benton has proposed a new visitor center to replace the BLM's existing visitor contact station. Congress has appropriated \$2.9 million for construction of a new facility. However, BLM is concerned about long-term funding for operations, maintenance and staffing.

The BLM is planning a 6,000-square foot center located on a 3.64-acre site adjacent to the Missouri River which will be donated by the City of Fort Benton when the building is complete.

### **ISSUES:**

The need for improved visitor facilities surfaced in the late 1980s. Our current 750-square foot visitor contact station is in Fort Benton's downtown area in a small, converted house that is more than 100 years old.

As the head of the 149-mile Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, Fort Benton is experiencing increased tourism that is being fed by the approaching Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. Tourism provides an economic boost to the local economy, but there is also recognition of infrastructure needs such as an improved visitor center.

### **MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:**

The BLM has prepared an environmental assessment that analyzes development of the visitor center. The EA has been reviewed by the public and after revision, was finalized.

Split Rock Studios has completed the interpretive prospectus. Meetings were held in Lewistown and Fort Benton in late June 2003 concerning interpretive themes. Explus and Mainstreet Design are designing the interpretive displays.

Kadmas, Lee, and Jackson and CTA (A&E firms) have completed the building design. The project was put out for bid in March 2005 and Roundtree Construction from Great Falls, Mont., was the successful bidder for construction of the building.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held June 30, 2005, and clearing of topsoil began July 5. The intention is to have the facility open to the public in mid to late summer 2006, with a grand opening ceremony scheduled for June 25, 2006.

### **BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:**

Local public interest is high. The concept of a new visitor center has support from both county and city officials. However, these local partners have questioned the amount of local support, such as in-kind services, that will be needed to augment BLM's limited capabilities to fund operation and maintenance costs.

### **CONTACT:**

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